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President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Sisoulith (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Allow me, Madam, to congratulate you upon your election as President of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly. I also wish to take this opportunity to convey our high appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his commendable achievements throughout his two consecutive terms of office, in the maintenance of peace and the promotion of socio-economic development the world over.

Despite the fact that today's global trend is towards peace and development cooperation, the international situation continues to undergo rapid and complex changes. Numerous events during the past year demonstrate that world peace, justice and security are far from being secured, due to the use of force in the settlement of international problems and violations of the sovereignty of Member States. All of this creates major impediments to peace and development cooperation among States and peoples.

Globalization offers new opportunities for economic development, yet its benefits are unevenly shared. Developing countries, in particular the most vulnerable groups, namely the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, have taken important steps to launch trade liberalization and further integrate themselves into the world economy. Nevertheless, those countries continue to face many problems, primarily the lack of basic infrastructure, access to markets, capital, new technology, financing and investment. In order to solve those problems, the international community must create an enabling environment conducive to development, whereby the interests of developing countries can be tangibly promoted.

To enable the United Nations to meet the challenges ahead, it should be reformed in a comprehensive, inclusive and balanced manner. This would enhance the important role of the Organization in maintaining international peace and security and promoting the peaceful settlement of disputes and international cooperation for development. In addition, the United Nations reform process should include the revitalization of the General Assembly, the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council and reform of the Security Council in order to render it more legitimate, democratic and effective.

Despite the failure of the recent United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, the

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Lao People's Democratic Republic considers that the Programme of Action is a living document and remains a framework for cooperation that empowers States to work towards its full and effective implementation.

The historic first meeting of heads of State or Government of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries, held on 14 September 2006 in Havana, Cuba, adopted a declaration reaffirming the right of access to and from the sea of landlocked countries, in accordance with international law, and underscored the importance of a midterm review to assess the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action. In my capacity as Chairman of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries, I appeal to the international community to further address the special needs and problems of that vulnerable group and to lend us support and assistance in our efforts to bring the midterm review process to a successful conclusion.

The country supports General Assembly resolutions that call upon the Government of the United States of America to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on the Republic of Cuba.

In the Middle East, there is an urgent need to implement Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), which would bring normalcy to the situation in Lebanon and pave the way for a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian problem, in conformity with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The situation in the Korean peninsula requires that problems should be resolved by peaceful means. In that regard, we call for the resumption of the Six-Party Talks based on the principles and commitments set out in the Joint Statement of 19 September 2005, in order to promote peace and security in the region.

The international community is deeply concerned to see the people of Iraq continue daily to endure significant losses in human lives and property. My country expresses the hope that peace, security and national unity will be restored as soon as possible.

In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, following the election of members of the National Assembly of the sixth legislature, held in early 2006, a new Government has been formed with the main tasks of consistently pursuing the policy of overall restructuring and ensuring the effective implementation of our five-year socio-economic development plan. That achievement would contribute to strengthening the nation's political stability and social security and to consolidating solidarity throughout society.

Over the past five years, the national economy has grown at an annual average rate of 6.3 per cent, the incidence of poverty has declined from 48 per cent of the population in 1990 to 28.7 per cent in 2006, and opium cultivation has been completely eradicated. Public investment was concentrated in areas such as infrastructure and social development, particularly human resource development which focuses on education, health and culture. Moreover, foreign direct investment has swiftly increased.

For the coming years, the Government will concentrate all its efforts and actively mobilize all of the country's forces and potential, in conjunction with favourable conditions and opportunities provided by the international community, for the purpose of ensuring the successful implementation of our national socio-economic development plan for the period 2006-2010, with a view to achieving steady economic growth at an annual rate of 7.5 per cent.

It is expected that by 2010, the slash and burn method of cultivation will definitely be terminated and that the problem of poor households will be basically solved. In addition, policies of support for small and medium enterprises will be implemented concurrently with the promotion and gradual expansion of industrialization, with a view to further improving the living conditions of our people and raising them to a higher level.

Similarly, the Lao People's Democratic Republic will further expand its relations and cooperation with the international community and will contribute actively to the regional integration process, particularly the integration of countries members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), with the aim of enhancing the role of the Lao People's Democratic Republic as an efficient partner of the countries in South-East Asia and other regions of the world.

In closing, the Lao People's Democratic Republic reiterates its determination to work in unison with the international community to create an environment conducive to promoting the well-being of all countries and peoples the world over.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hor Namhong, Deputy Prime Minister and

Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia.

Mr. Hor (Cambodia): At the outset, on behalf of the Cambodian delegation, let me extend our heartfelt congratulations to you, Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, on your election to the presidency of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly. Your election to that important post is a testament to Your Excellency's distinctive abilities and impressive achievements over the years. I am convinced that under your direction, this year's session will achieve a successful outcome.

Please allow me also to pay tribute to the vision and tireless efforts of Secretary-General Kofi Annan in promoting global peace and in taking the necessary steps to encourage many initiatives for the reform of the United Nations. Our appreciation is also addressed to His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson for his efficient leadership as President of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, as well as for his countless contributions to United Nations reform initiatives.

In the face of uncertainties and challenges, where the world seems to be inundated with conflicts and serious threats — such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), terrorism, environmental degradation and infectious diseases — it is important for all of us to keep our commitment to maintain peace and security in the world. In addition, I believe that the reduction of global poverty and the achievement of sustainable development in many developing countries are vital for human security. At the same time, they are a daunting task for the United Nations as a catalyst of the international community in helping to improve the situation of those countries.

Concerning the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Cambodia is of the view that the international community needs to be more vigilant about the issue and to ensure that WMDs or their components do not fall into the wrong hands — those of terrorists, organ.zed crime groups or others — which could have dangerous implications for international peace and security. In that regard, we need to strengthen the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) regime in order to secure a better and more peaceful world for all. Nor should small arms and light weapons be underestimated, as they are an equally dangerous source of conflict, transnational crime and violence in many regions and countries.

The fight against terrorism remains of utmost priority for all Governments and for the United Nations, given the continuing threat posed by terrorism despite the serious measures and actions that have been taken by Governments and international and regional organizations at various levels, including this world body. To combat terrorism effectively requires, I believe, more efforts, more technical capacity, more education, more information-sharing among law enforcement authorities and intelligence communities and maybe more understanding in some specific cases of the root causes of acts of violence which are tantamount to reactions of despair.

Concerning the Middle East crisis, we have to congratulate the Security Council on the adoption of its resolution 1701 (2006) to end the recent war in Lebanon. We call upon all parties concerned to fully respect that resolution in order to prevent a repetition of the conflict and further loss of innocent life. In the same vein, the international community should work more actively to help bring about a permanent end to the violence between Palestine and Israel. I believe that peace in the Middle East will be better guaranteed only when the leaders of both sides — Palestine and Israel — have the courage and wisdom to realize that they cannot continue to destroy each other forever, but must work together for a lasting peace in the region.

Both Israel and Palestine have the right to coexist as independent and sovereign States. At the same time, they need to overcome their historical animosity and hatred towards each other. Whether they like it or not, Israel and Palestine are destined to coexist as neighbours forever. I strongly believe that a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would create the foundation for durable peace and security in the entire Middle East.

With regard to United Nations reform, it is clear that in recent years, every State member of the world body has wanted the United Nations to be reformed. However, when the opportunity arises, we face a deadlock on this very important issue, because too much emphasis has been placed on reform of the Security Council. In that regard, I think that we should learn this lesson and try to avoid repeating such mistakes in the future. In other words, we should take a step-by-step approach and tackle minor problems first,

such as strengthening the role of the Economic and Social Council to deal with development, since that issue is less controversial and there is more inclination to support it.

Next, we might consider revitalizing the General Assembly as the sole body representative of all United Nations Member States. Afterward, we can move forward to the reform of the Security Council. We have to start first with issues where consensus could be easily reached, and then move to the more difficult ones, without having to completely stall the United Nations reform process.

Since their adoption in 2000, by and large there has been progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). But in actuality there has been little achievement for developing countries thus far due to a number of factors, such as lack of financial and human resources, including the negative impact of globalization, which has led to a widening gap between developed countries and poor nations.

In Cambodia, the Royal Government has set up its own "MDGs", called the Cambodia Millennium Development Goals, with specific target priorities. Since their establishment, Cambodia has made positive progress in some areas, such as reducing poverty, combating HIV/AIDS and improving the livelihood of our people, thanks to the rectangular strategy of the Royal Government, which yielded strong economic growth over the past year.

Extreme poverty in the world today is an affront to the whole world with 1.3 billion people still living on the margins of life, earning less than one dollar a day, while another 1.8 billion are living on less than two dollars a day, in spite of the commitment to the MDGs in 2000. Addressing this crucial problem requires painstaking efforts at the national and international levels. The eradication of poverty is, first and foremost, the responsibility of the whole world and requires the cooperation of the developed countries and international organizations. Given the enormous resources and wealth of this world, I believe that no one on this planet should go hungry while in developed countries there is an over-supply of food, which has led to wasteful dumping.

To deal with global poverty, a comprehensive approach and collective actions are needed. Official development assistance, debt relief, market access, transfer of know-how, foreign direct investment and so forth must be addressed all together, so that developing countries can catch up with the current globalization in order to bridge the gap between peoples and nations in this world where we all are living.

Finally, let me reiterate that our world today will continue to face major global threats and challenges. The role of the United Nations, as an Organization that is representative of the whole world, in tackling these phenomena is of paramount importance for humankind. Therefore, Cambodia hopes that United Nations reform can move ahead to significantly contribute to dealing with these challenges successfully.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. K. P. Sharma Oli, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal.

Mr. Oli (Nepal): At the outset, Madam, I would like to congratulate you warmly on your election as President of the General Assembly at this session and to assure you of my delegation's full cooperation in discharging the responsibilities entrusted to you. I am fully confident that we will be able to bring the business of this session to a successful conclusion under your leadership.

His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson, the outgoing President, deserves our sincere appreciation for a job well done.

I join previous speakers in heartily welcoming the Republic of Montenegro as a fellow Member of this world body. The continued expansion of the membership underlines the importance of the United Nations as an Organization of truly global character, centrality and indispensability in global affairs.

This is, indeed, a great opportunity for me to represent the voice of the democratic Government and the sovereign people of Nepal in this Assembly. I have brought with me greetings and best wishes from the Government and the people of Nepal for the success of this session.

I wish to inform the Assembly that Nepal is undergoing a fundamental transformation following the restoration of democracy through the peaceful people's movement in April 2006. The people of Nepal has become, for the first time in history, the real source of sovereignty and State authority. The historic parliamentary proclamation of 18 May 2006, and the subsequent decisions of the parliament, have made real contributions to safeguarding and consolidating the

gains of the people's movement. We are currently engaged in institutionalizing an edifice of a democratic and inclusive Nepali State through the reinstated parliament.

The people and the Government of Nepal are thankful to the international community for its strong support during our struggle for democracy. We are hopeful of even greater support and solidarity in our transition towards full-fledged democracy and lasting peace.

This momentous change in Nepal has also led to the conversion of a protracted conflict into a peace process, and we are confident that it will be brought to a successful conclusion. I take this opportunity to sincerely express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his assistance to the peace process, including in the monitoring of human rights, assistance in ceasefire monitoring, arms management and the observation of elections to the Constituent Assembly, at our request. The successful resolution of our internal conflict will set a worthwhile example to the rest of the world that democracy is indispensable and brightens the prospects for resolution of conflicts of all kinds.

Now, we have pressing post-conflict reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction needs. Meeting these challenges requires an enhanced level of international support and assistance. Peace, security, stability, democracy and development constitute global public goods. It is critically important that newly emerged democracies are safeguarded and protected, thus allowing them to develop further and flourish. With this vision in mind, we strongly support the newly established United Nations Democracy Fund.

The United Nations today is confronted with numerous challenges, such as international terrorism and transnational crime, the threat of use of weapons of mass destruction, narcotic drugs and human trafficking, money-laundering and other financial crimes, regional conflicts and low-intensity wars, extreme poverty and hunger, human rights abuses, successive natural disasters and the threats posed by pandemics such as HIV/AIDS and avian flu.

These challenges call for new wisdom founded on the principles of collective security, well-being and prosperity. The United Nations is uniquely placed to muster the much-needed philosophical underpinning because of its standing as a global body armed with legitimacy. New wisdom alone will not be enough to deal with these problems if new strategies, new tools and new resources do not match it. Nepal firmly believes that multilateral solutions are required to address problems and challenges of a global nature. Multilateralism is the key to promoting global participation in problem-solving and to ensuring collective ownership of outcomes.

Today, old and new threats to peace and security exist side by side. While military threats to security are diminishing gradually, new sources of threat have emerged and are likely to disturb international peace and security in more than one way.

The growing menace of international terrorism characterizes the security scenario in our post-cold-war world. It has been the consistent policy of Nepal to unequivocally condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. It is disheartening to note that no international consensus has yet emerged paving the way for the early conclusion of a comprehensive international convention against terrorism. In this context, we welcome the adoption of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288).

We are concerned about the dismal progress on disarmament. After failing to agree on non-proliferation last year, we were unable to produce an agreement during the review of the regime to control small arms and light weapons. We are also constantly reminded of the deadlock in efforts to resolve nuclear issues by peaceful means. Nepal stands for general and complete disarmament of all weapons of mass destruction, including biological, chemical, nuclear and radiological weapons, in a time-bound manner. The demand of our time is that we compete for peace, not war, and for development, not armaments.

We have offered to host, in Kathmandu, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament for Asia and the Pacific. Despite our long-standing commitment and sincere efforts, the Centre has yet to be relocated. I wish to reiterate that the Government of Nepal is ready to sign the host country agreement, pursuant to the Assembly resolution, as soon as the Secretariat provides it with a draft. We urge the Secretariat to conclude the necessary procedures for the relocation of the Centre to Nepal without further delay.

The recent upsurge of violence in Lebanon has left unbearable human tragedy in its wake and has

resulted in the large-scale destruction of material property. We welcome the ongoing ceasefire and express our support for Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) on strengthening the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. We are committed to contributing a battalion of troops for the cause of peace there.

Nepal's profound interest and continued participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions underscores its contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security. Even when it had its own internal conflict, Nepal never stopped sending troops to United Nations peacekeeping missions. Nepalese Blue Helmets have served in various missions, including in many trouble spots, in an exemplary manner, earning international repute for them and their country. Currently, Nepal has over 3,500 troops in various United Nations missions. Many of them have sacrificed their precious lives in the service of peace and humanity. Nepal will continue to uphold this noble cause and participate in future missions when asked to do so.

Nepal's commitment to human rights is total and unflinching. Nepal firmly believes that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing. We welcomed the establishment of the Human Rights Council in the belief that that body will prove effective in protecting and promoting human rights around the globe based on the salient principles of universality, objectivity and non-selectivity.

The current Government of Nepal has accorded top priority to the protection and promotion of human rights with a view to translating Nepal's international human rights commitments and obligations into reality. We have been working closely with the United Nations human rights bodies, including the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal, to create an environment in which full enjoyment of human rights by all is guaranteed. The return of democracy and the start of the peace process have led to a significant improvement in the protection of human rights in Nepal. We greatly appreciate the role played by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal in improving the human rights situation in the country.

We are determined to bring to an end the culture of impunity which was so pervasive during the autocratic regime. Our belief is that no one is above the law and that those who violate and abuse human rights must be brought to justice. We are fully committed to protecting human rights in all situations and creating a framework to bring to justice those who have violated human rights in the past.

Opportunities arising out of globalization, such as those associated with global migration, have been stifled by unfriendly policy regimes around the world. The rights of migrant workers must be protected in all situations in accordance with international norms. Nepal's experience shows that the benefit of remittances generated by migrant workers counts a great deal for developing countries. But that cannot in any way be a substitute for development assistance, debt relief or trade concessions.

The benefits of trade liberalization are not distributed equitably. The multilateral trading regime must be made responsive to the needs and requirements of the developing and least developed countries. Enhanced trading opportunities, coupled with productive capacities, are critically important for the achievement of sustained economic growth and poverty reduction in the least developed countries (LDCs). The agreed commitments for duty-free and quota-free access for the products of the least developed countries need to be complemented with favourable rules on origin.

We are concerned about the suspension of World Trade Organization (WTO) talks on the development round, and urge the immediate revival of the talks to complete the Doha Development Agenda.

Our development agenda has been advancing rather slowly. We realize that, given the current pace, many countries will not be able to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. It reminds us that we must urgently and sincerely implement all the commitments agreed to in the various global compacts of recent years, including the Monterrey Consensus, the Millennium Declaration, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries.

This year's midterm review of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries showed that most of the least developed countries will not be able to achieve the agreed targets within the previously

defined time frame unless we accelerate the pace of implementation.

The least developed countries need better policies on aid, trade, investment, debt relief and capacity-building, as well as timely reforms in the international financial institutions. We call on the international community to take a holistic approach, combining policies to support the LDC development agenda. The least developed countries need a substantial flow of external aid and investment if they are to meet those goals. Investment in poorer countries is not just a moral responsibility; it is investment in the collective security of the world.

Many least developed countries are handicapped as a result of being landlocked, which significantly reduces their competitive edge in regional and multilateral trading regimes. This state of affairs continues to frustrate their development efforts. We urge the international community to pay greater attention to the plight of those countries and to make serious efforts to implement internationally agreed commitments.

It is a scar on our conscience that hundreds of millions of people are living as refugees in various parts of the globe. The international community must take it as its bounden duty to address their concerns in a non-selective manner.

I regret to inform the Assembly that more than 100,000 refugees from southern Bhutan have been in camps in Nepal for over a decade and half — a painful experience — despite the bilateral agreements reached between Nepal and Bhutan. With no early and lasting solution on the horizon, the refugees are showing increasing signs of frustration and desperation. In essence, this is a problem between the Government of Bhutan and its citizens. Nepal has entered the picture simply because it has provided shelter to fleeing refuges on humanitarian grounds. The issue cannot be resolved in the absence of a genuine willingness on the part of the Government of Bhutan to solve this problem.

The international community must exert a positive influence so as to break the impasse. We stress that the Bhutanese refuges must be given the right to return to their home country in conditions of dignity and respect and that any solution must be acceptable to them. Nepal also supports the democratic aspirations of the people of Bhutan and urges Bhutan to accommodate the plight of the refugees in their political dispensation.

Our Organization has made great strides, especially in the adoption of the reform measures endorsed by world leaders here last year. The Government of Nepal remains committed to supporting all reform initiatives aimed at addressing the concerns and aspirations of all Member States.

The strength of the United Nations lies in its democratic decision-making and in its impartiality, neutrality and efficiency. The General Assembly — the only global body in which the voices of the peoples of the world can be heard — must be placed at the forefront of all decision-making processes within the United Nations. The organs dealing with socio-economic issues must be strengthened and enabled to take a lead role in the fulfilment of international development objectives.

Contemporary realities dictate that the United Nations must undergo a fundamental transformation without undermining its founding principles and objectives. Any reform of the United Nations will be incomplete without a commensurate reform of its principal organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. The Security Council must be democratized so as to provide it with greater legitimacy and credibility. There is a genuine need to increase Council membership, in both the permanent and non-permanent categories, so as to make the Council more representative. Such an increase should include two permanent seats each for the Asian and African regions, one for Latin America and one for Western Europe. We also need to improve the Council's working methods.

This year, Member States will elect the next Secretary-General of our Organization. In accordance with the principle of equitable geographical representation and that of rotation, Nepal reiterates that the next Secretary-General should come from Asia. We also believe that a greater role should be played by the Assembly in the appointment of the Secretary-General. I commend the role played by the outgoing Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, during his term of office. He led important reforms at the United Nations and made genuine efforts to establish the central role of our Organization in resolving global problems and debating international issues.

Nepal has submitted its candidature for non-permanent membership of the Security Council for the period 2007-2008. We think that we rightly deserve it, as nearly two decades have elapsed since we last served on the Council, in 1988-1989. This world body is fully aware that Nepal has for a long time been making substantial contributions to the maintenance of international peace and security by regularly providing troops to various peacekeeping missions. Moreover, we believe that Nepal's election to the Council this time around would represent a significant recognition of its democratic credentials in a changed context. The people of Nepal deserve due recognition from the international community for their unprecedented courage and for the determination with which they have defeated autocracy and restored democracy. I make a sincere appeal to fellow Members to extend their valuable support to Nepal's candidature and allow it to serve on the Council with renewed confidence in the fulfilment of its fundamental responsibilities.

The purposes and principles of the United Nations contained in its Charter, including the sovereign equality of nations, the peaceful resolution of all disputes, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, and the principle of refraining from the threat or use of force are sacrosanct to Nepal. I solemnly reiterate Nepal's profound commitment to the founding objectives and principles of the United Nations, as enshrined in its Charter.

The United Nations today suffers from a lack of credibility, an inability to arrive at important decisions, weak implementation of its own declarations and decisions, and slowness in responding to challenges that require its most pressing attention. We need to change this situation. Together, we can better equip our Organization to respond to those challenges.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jean Ping, Minister of State, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, la Francophonie and Regional Integration of Gabon and former President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Ping (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): Madam President, I should like at the outset sincerely to congratulate you on your well-deserved election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. Your election represents not only a mark of considerable recognition for the Kingdom of Bahrain, which has tirelessly worked to promote the purposes and principles of the United Nations, but also, in personal terms, the culmination of your long legal and diplomatic career.

Above and beyond the usual courtesies, I should like to encourage you, Madam, and to assure you of our full readiness to cooperate to ensure the success of your lofty mission.

I should like also to pay tribute to Mr. Jan Eliasson for the talent, dedication and perseverance with which he guided our work throughout the sixtieth session. I should like in particular to acknowledge him for his determination in leading the negotiations that achieved considerable progress in implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the 2005 World Summit.

Lastly, I should like to convey to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, our deep admiration for the wisdom and courage he has consistently shown in discharging his difficult mandate, and in particular for the ambitious measures he initiated throughout his two terms of office to adapt the United Nations to current realities.

At a time when his tenure as Secretary-General is coming to an end and many observers will be reviewing and assessing his accomplishments, I should like, for may part, to pay a well-deserved tribute to him for having provided us with a clear vision of the work of the United Nations in terms of the three pillars of international peace and security, development and the promotion of human rights worldwide.

The consensus adoption of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (resolution 60/1) was an unequivocal recognition by our leaders of the General Assembly's central role as the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations. I welcome the fact that since the Summit, most of the important recommendations of the Outcome Document have already been implemented as part of the United Nations reform process.

Indeed, following the difficult negotiations, the sixtieth session of the General Assembly established two important bodies — the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council — both of which, as we know, have been operational since June. In addition, the Central Emergency Response Fund was established, and a number of major resolutions were adopted. I am thinking in particular about resolution

60/42, on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel; the resolution on development; and, most recently, resolution 60/288, on the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

During the present session, bolstered by that major progress, we must continue our efforts to complete the reform process. For example, we must intensify our efforts to conclude the negotiations aimed at adopting a comprehensive convention against international terrorism and at reforming the Secretariat, the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council.

The theme you proposed for this year's general debate, Madam President, "Implementing a global partnership for development", is very timely. That theme, which echoes Goal 8 of the Millennium Development Goals, will undoubtedly make it possible to follow up and implement the decisions emanating from the Monterrey Consensus and reaffirmed at the September 2005 World Summit.

It is extremely urgent that all development partners honour all their commitments. Our appeal to them takes fully into account the primary responsibility of all States to plan and carry out their own development. It also addresses the many constraints hampering the developing countries, in particular the impact of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases on their populations and economies.

Therefore, I cannot fail to welcome the fact that, in the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS (resolution 60/262), adopted on 2 June 2006 at the end of the High-level Meeting devoted to follow-up on the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, the international community stressed the special situation of sub-Saharan Africa and recognized the efforts made by African Governments to fight the pandemic.

Gabon, for its part, has undertaken ambitious initiatives ranging from awareness raising to the implementation of action plans such as the multisectoral strategic plan to fight AIDS. The Gabonese head of State and his spouse, Ms. Edith Lucie Bongo Ondimba, are personally involved in that initiative.

Aware of the threat that the pandemic poses to human development and security, we should advocate more courageous measures aimed in particular at increasing the contributions to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, strengthening prevention methods and improving access to treatment for infected persons.

However, the many challenges facing African States are not inevitable. That is the strong conviction that led African heads of State or Government to launch the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a comprehensive vision in which African countries have pledged, through good economic and political governance, to take control of the social, economic and political destiny of their respective nations. While NEPAD's main goal is development, we are fully aware that there can be no development without a framework that fosters peace, security and respect for human dignity.

Our world continues to be characterized by tension and deep crises that aggravate the prevailing instability and insecurity. Old and new conflicts continue to threaten the peace and security of a number of nations, and their effects have strong repercussions at the regional and international levels.

The violent conflict that has once again shaken the Middle East — a conflict that has claimed hundreds of innocent human lives and caused enormous material damage — has shown how essential it is to do everything possible to establish a lasting peace in that part of the world. With specific regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, only collective and sustained efforts based on the principle of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security can make it possible to achieve a just, lasting and equitable settlement of that conflict. Gabon, for its part, endorses the idea of urgently holding an international conference on the Middle East.

In Africa, many hot spots of tension also remain worrisome. While we should welcome the Darfur Peace Agreement, signed at Abuja in May 2006, we must acknowledge that the overall situation remains fragile. The persistent divisions between certain parties to the conflict even threaten to jeopardize the Agreement, which was reached at considerable effort. Here, I should like to pay a well-deserved tribute to the international community, and in particular the African Union, for their tireless efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Darfur crisis.

The situation in Côte d'Ivoire also continues to be a source of concern for Africa and the rest of the international community. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a historic and crucial phase has begun with the holding of general elections in that brotherly country. Here, I wish to pay tribute to the international community, particularly the European Union — whose EUFOR peacekeeping troops are stationed in Gabon — and to the United Nations. Its support, together with that of EUFOR, has thus far made it possible to hold smooth general elections in that country, particularly the first round of the presidential election, which took place on 30 July 2006.

It is now essential that all Congolese political actors continue, in a spirit of patriotic fervour, to consolidate the gains of the democratic transition process in an atmosphere of peace and harmony. In order to do that, they will also need the active support and sustained commitment of the international community to ensure that the enormous sacrifices made by all do not come to naught for lack of follow-up.

In that regard, the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission is an appropriate institutional response to the many needs of countries emerging from conflict. I take this opportunity to congratulate Ambassador Ismael Gaspar Martins of Angola on his election as Chairman of the Commission's Organizational Committee. I welcome the fact that two African countries, Burundi and Sierra Leone — which have experienced many years of war — have been chosen as the first countries to benefit from the Commission's attention.

However, if our efforts to strengthen international peace and security are to be effective, they must also focus in particular on the area of conflict prevention. The excellent report of the Secretary-General on the prevention of armed conflict (A/60/891) offers us a good foundation for our work as we consider this important issue.

We achieved a major breakthrough in 2001 with the adoption of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eliminate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. We regret, however, that the June and July 2006 review conference for the Programme of Action ended in failure. Despite this, we need to pursue the implementation of the Programme, as well as the adoption of an international instrument on the marking and tracing of these weapons. We also need to move forward with consultations in order to begin negotiations leading to the adoption of an instrument on brokering. Similarly, we have the moral duty and shared responsibility to renew disarmament negotiations, particularly in the nuclear sphere.

One of the major trials facing our Organization is the continuation and completion of negotiations on Security Council reform, in accordance with the recommendation made by heads of State or Government at the September 2005 World Summit. We also need to implement the resolutions regarding the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, the most recent of which was adopted on 8 September 2006 as resolution 60/286. At the same time, major negotiations in the Assembly over the past two sessions have demonstrated, if such demonstration were needed, how crucial a vitalized Assembly is for our Organization. We also need to take the appropriate measures to ensure greater transparency and consistency in the functioning of the United Nations system, ensuring improved implementation of its missions.

As you are aware, Madam President, we have a particularly heavy programme of work. I am certain that, under your able guidance, the General Assembly will make progress in the various areas of its agenda. We will therefore need to continue to work with a heightened sense of our collective interest. The very credibility of our Organization depends on it.

The President: I now call on Her Excellency Mrs. Joy Uche Ogwu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Mrs. Ogwu (Nigeria): I bring you, Madam President, good tidings from Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, President and Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, who could not be here in person as a result of a national tragedy. He has asked me to deliver his statement to the Assembly and it is now my privilege and honour to read it out.

> "On behalf of the people and the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to you, Madam, and your country, the Kingdom of Bahrain, on your historic election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. Your assumption of that high office is a source of inspiration to us all, particularly to women all

over the world. I assure you of the support and cooperation of my delegation.

"I would like to extend my profound appreciation to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson, for the commitment and dedication with which he presided over the affairs of the sixtieth session. This was particularly evident during the delicate negotiations that resulted in the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and the creation of the Human Rights Council.

"The founding fathers of the United Nations envisaged an international organization whose primary strength would rest on the ability of its Members to act collectively and in a spirit of cooperation in solving international problems.

"The theme for this year's general debate, 'Implementing a global partnership for development', aptly captures this aspiration and, indeed, reaffirms one of the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals. Nigeria restates its firm commitment to the principle that genuine global partnership is the key to development. This is particularly so in the face of the many challenges confronting us today.

"For Africa, the most urgent challenge remains the resolution of conflicts and the maintenance of peace and security as the foundation for socio-economic progress. We remain undaunted and have collectively decided to take action to address the problem under the auspices of the African Union. Our efforts have been bolstered by the active engagement of the Security Council and the international community, for which we remain grateful. I am happy to note that in Liberia and Sierra Leone, where hostilities have happily ceased, there are signs of progress everywhere as democracy and its benefits take their most important first steps.

"With respect to Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria welcomes the recent efforts by all parties to overcome their differences through dialogue. We urge them to remain steadfast in their commitment in order to ensure that the peace process remains on course. However, it is now doubtful that elections can take place in October. But we must not allow the elections in Côte d'Ivoire to be postponed beyond 31 December 2006. If the proposed extraordinary meeting of the Economic Community of West African States in early October fails to achieve this goal, a Security Council resolution will become necessary to impose heavy sanctions on all culprits and their relations.

"Nigeria is encouraged by the progress towards implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement, which was signed in Abuja last June. We are, however, concerned by the slow pace of implementation regarding key aspects of the plan, which has exacerbated the humanitarian situation. We share the frustration of the international community over the lack of access to vulnerable groups in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. We call on all parties to respect their commitments.

"The situation in Darfur has placed a heavy burden on the African Union and continues to exert pressure on its meagre resources, as it struggles to maintain a peacekeeping force of over 7,000 troops. Africa's commitment to peace in Darfur was reaffirmed by the latest decision of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, at its meeting in New York on 20 September 2006, to extend the mandate of the African Mission in the Sudan (AMIS) until 31 December 2006. Nigeria calls on the international community to urgently assist the African Union with the logistical and financial support to sustain AMIS through that date.

"If the early removal of the obstacles that have thus far prevented the conclusion of the negotiations on the replacement of the African Union force with a United Nations peacekeeping force cannot be achieved, the African Union may be left with no other option but to allow the troops to return to the contributing countries. The consequences of the withdrawal of AMIS without a United Nations umbrella will be the full responsibility of the Government of the Sudan.

"Nigeria is concerned by the increasing threat of violence and insecurity in the world brought about by threats or acts of terrorism. Nigeria strongly condemns all acts of terrorism and calls upon the international community to redouble its efforts to defeat this heinous crime in all its forms and manifestations.

"On the situation in the Middle East, Nigeria welcomes Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and calls for the implementation of the terms of the ceasefire by both parties. We believe, however, that a long-lasting solution must come through dialogue and a readiness to abandon violence as a means of resolving the crisis. The root causes of the Middle East crisis must also be addressed in a comprehensive manner for lasting peace to be attained. We reaffirm our commitment to a two-State arrangement: Israel and Palestine living in peace within secure borders, in accordance with Security Council resolutions. We therefore call on the international community to show greater commitment to the peaceful and early resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

"West Africa has experienced conflicts for many years as a result of the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region. We believe that the restoration and maintenance of peace are critical for socio-economic development in the subregion. Towards that end, in June this year, States member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted a landmark Convention on Small Arms, Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Associated Material to reduce violence in the subregion and pave the way for the achievement of peace, security, stability, cooperation and development. The Convention bans international arms transfers, except those for the legitimate defence and security needs of member States. Of greatest significance is the ban on transfers to non-State actors, who have been largely responsible for political instability in the subregion, as elsewhere.

"In this regard, I wish to express Nigeria's deep disappointment that the first United Nations Review Conference on implementation of the Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons failed to agree on a final document, including a similar ban on arms transfers to non-State actors. I urge all Member States to be guided by the example of ECOWAS on this issue when and if the Conference reconvenes.

"As a demonstration of Nigeria's commitment to the fight against illicit small arms, we have deposited the instrument of ratification of the Firearms Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. We also call for a comprehensive and legally binding global arms trade treaty.

"Humankind has made giant strides in the field of nuclear technology since the discovery of the atom. This has opened up vistas of opportunities for determined and committed societies to uplift the standard of living of their citizenry. Indeed, nuclear energy has become a veritable source of socio-economic development and a reliable source of electricity generation. We note in particular the global trend towards the utilization of nuclear technology for the generation of electricity, agricultural development, human health and environmental development, especially for developing countries.

"In the context of this development and of the enormous energy crisis that confronts us in Nigeria, my Government decided to inaugurate the Board of the Nigeria Atomic Energy Commission. With the inauguration of the Board, our quest for energy self-sufficiency has begun.

"Nigeria remains resolute in its commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Treaty of Pelindaba on the African nuclear-weapon-free zone. We wish to assure the international community of our determination to restrict the use of nuclear energy to purely peaceful purposes.

"I take this opportunity to reiterate our deep appreciation to this body for the invaluable support it has given to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). We are also very appreciative of the interest shown by the international community and the commitments it has made in support of NEPAD. The NEPAD initiative remains our continent's most viable socio-economic blueprint; it could bring sustained economic growth while strengthening good governance and enhancing the protection of the human rights of our peoples.

"Trade is one of the most potent and genuine engines of economic growth and development. We therefore support efforts that would enhance the ability of our countries to enjoy the benefits of the successful conclusion of agreements on regimes under the auspices of the

World Trade Organization (WTO). In this connection, we regard the recent breakdown of the WTO Doha round of development talks as a very serious setback. The successful conclusion of Doha development talks and the implementation of their outcome would provide succour to the almost 1 billion people currently subsisting on less than one dollar a day. We urge all parties to return to the negotiating table and resume talks in the spirit of global partnership, cooperation and global economic progress.

"Nigeria remains committed to the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic, malaria, tuberculosis and related diseases. We have taken bold steps to deal with them. To this end, we hosted the Special Summit of the African Union on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in Abuja in May this year. At the Summit, African leaders reaffirmed their commitment to earlier declarations and pledged to take immediate action to ensure universal access to relevant drugs. We applaud the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS (resolution 60/262) which was adopted at the United Nations High-level Meeting on HIV/AIDS last June and hope that it will be fully implemented.

"On 14 August this year, Nigeria lowered its flag for the last time on the Bakassi peninsula and effectively withdrew its presence there in accordance with the ruling of the International Court of Justice. With this final act, Nigeria has fulfilled its obligations under the terms of the agreement between my country and Cameroon. I use this opportunity to recognize the positive contributions of Mr. Kofi Annan and members of the international community and to thank them for their assistance and support. Nigeria hopes that our brotherly neighbour will protect and respect the rights and freedoms of Nigerian nationals who decide to remain in the area in accordance with the mutually agreed terms.

"Nigeria believes that the reform of the United Nations system must not lose momentum. National or regional interests should not be allowed to obscure our common objectives for a reinvigorated United Nations. The reform should be linked to the overall interest of making our Organization stronger, more effective and better positioned to meet the challenges facing both the weak and the strong.

"The identity, importance and relevance of the different organs of the Organization must be maintained. Above all, nothing should be done to weaken one in favour of the other. The General Assembly, as the pre-eminent, deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations, deserves the support of all Members. It remains the only organ where States big or small, rich or poor, find equality and voice.

"It is in this context that African countries, along with other Members of the United Nations, have called for the reform of the Security Council. For us, no reform will be complete without the reform of that vital organ. The Security Council, as now constituted, does not reflect the realities of our time. We hope that progress will be made on this issue during this session.

"I cannot conclude this statement without paying a special tribute to my brother, the distinguished statesman Mr. Kofi Annan. Nigeria salutes his dedicated service to our Organization. He has, in the past 10 years, assiduously piloted the United Nations through very important milestones and turbulent waters.

"It is, indeed, impossible to forget the reform agenda that you have initiated and set in motion. We are proud of you and your services and wish you the best in your future endeavours. As I am attending the General Assembly for the last time in my capacity as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, I wish to take this opportunity to thank all my colleagues and the Secretary-General as well as all the staff of our Organization for their support and cooperation over the past seven years."

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Dame Billie Miller, MP, Senior Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados.

Dame Billie Miller (Barbados): I am pleased to join with preceding speakers in congratulating you on your election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. The fact that you are a woman makes me doubly happy. In 61 years you are only the

third female President of the Assembly. Throughout your distinguished career, you have championed with determination and courage the cause of women's rights, and I am confident that you will bring these and other outstanding qualities to your presidency. I pledge to you the fullest cooperation of the delegation of Barbados.

I would also wish to thank and congratulate your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his leadership at the sixtieth session of the General Assembly and in particular for the skill he demonstrated in that very challenging task.

I must also take this opportunity to say a special farewell on behalf of the Government and people of Barbados to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who has served this Organization with great skill and dedication over the past 10 years. The Secretary-General has had to face myriad challenges, and he has always found the strength of character, purpose and fortitude to craft appropriate solutions. Barbados wishes the Secretary-General well as he proceeds into retirement at the beginning of next year, and we look forward to welcoming him again to the beautiful shores of Barbados whenever he feels the need for some respite and recuperation.

I would also like at this time to welcome our newest Member, Montenegro, into the family of the United Nations.

In July this year, the formal return of Haiti to the councils of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was greeted with great satisfaction by all. At that time, the CARICOM heads of Government pledged their full assistance to Haiti to facilitate efforts to promote that country's development and renewal. We call on the international community to support the strengthening of democracy and the social and economic development of Haiti and to disburse in a timely manner the funds pledged for Haiti's reinvigoration and development. We cannot afford to repeat past mistakes.

This session of the General Assembly provides an important first opportunity to review and assess the progress in the implementation of the decisions of the historic 2005 World Summit. At this juncture, it is Barbados's opinion that the results are decidedly mixed. The reform agenda decided on at the World Summit, encompassed a broad spectrum of issues. We are pleased that progress has been made in areas such as the establishment of the Human Rights Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Central Emergency Response Fund, the agreement on a counter-terrorism strategy and the revitalization of the General Assembly. We regret that progress on the cluster of development issues, which enjoyed broad consensus at the 2005 World Summit, has been painfully slow. Also, further work needs to be undertaken on Secretariat and management reform as well as on reform of the Security Council.

The primacy of development on the global agenda must be ensured. Barbados considers the initiative to select development as the theme for this general debate to be laudable. If we are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, the next ten years must be the decade of implementation, in which we collectively mobilize the will and resources needed. In this connection, we commend the Secretary-General for recommending a number of additional targets that would facilitate the monitoring of progress in the implementation of the Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1).

When I addressed this Assembly one year ago, I called for the adoption of a new target within the MDG framework on universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Barbados thanks the Secretary-General for recognizing the critical link between sexual and reproductive health and rights and development, and we fully support his recommendation for a new target under Goal 6 of the MDGs. We are equally supportive of his other recommendations for new targets on universal access for treatment of HIV/AIDS by 2010 and on decent work and productive employment.

We would, too, like to see speedier implementation of the decisions on increased financial resources for development which were made last year at the Group of Eight (G-8) meeting at Gleneagles and at the World Summit. These resources are now needed urgently, particularly by those countries, like my own, that have prepared their comprehensive national development strategies to achieve the MDGs and other international development goals and objectives.

While the developing countries bear responsibility for their own development, national actions will not be sufficient to bring about their fuller participation in the global economy. These actions must be complemented by a supportive international

system, the essential elements of which include improvement in global governance, more coherence in the operation of the United Nations system and a greater voice for the United Nations in the global development policy dialogue.

Changes in global governance have not kept pace with the growth of global interdependence, and far-reaching institutional changes are required to bring about a more effective system. We call for democratization of the governance of the international financial and trade systems and concrete steps to be taken to end the marginalization of developing countries and small economies in the policy formulation and decision-making processes in the multilateral, financial and trade institutions. Globalization must be made more inclusive and its benefits more equitably distributed.

Barbados also believes that improvement in global governance must be mirrored in the strengthening of the management and coordination of the United Nations operational activities at the country level. This will ensure delivery of better coordinated development assistance. It will lead to better absorption of aid by recipient countries and ultimately facilitate their attainment of the MDGs. Indeed, the United Nations must be developmentally holistic. We anxiously await the Secretary-General's report on the work of the High-level Panel on this issue. A stronger United Nations voice in development led by a revitalized Economic and Social Council will also contribute to an improved international system. Barbados will continue to work with other Member States to adopt a resolution on reform of the Economic and Social Council at this sixty-first session of the General Assembly.

Permit me to focus for a few moments on the issue of trade; for there is nothing else more important for small developing countries than an improved multilateral trading system if we are to have the chance to participate in and benefit from the ongoing process of globalization. The failure of WTO talks to reach agreement on new commitments for trade reform in the agricultural and industrial goods sectors represents a very real crisis in international trade negotiations. The challenges of reforming trade in these areas are not insurmountable. We call on the developed countries to demonstrate a unity of purpose to resolve differences among themselves, remembering that this round of trade talks is about development, or more precisely about raising the standard of living of people in developing countries. Consistent with the theme of this year's session of the Assembly, "Implementing a global partnership for development", developed and developing countries must partner together to achieve a workable agreement.

If there is to be a successful outcome to the trade negotiations, a narrow focus on trade liberalization and enhanced market access alone will not be enough. For while it is important to have agreements that open up access to markets, it is even more essential for any negotiated trade agreement to contain provisions that would assist developing countries to implement policies aimed at transforming their economies. In other words, market access is meaningless without goods and services with which to trade.

An adjustment mechanism will be required to assist developing countries in coping with the loss of preferences, markets and the resultant reduction in financial resources during this most important transitional phase of their development. For the small and vulnerable economies this will mean some form of special and differential treatment to facilitate their full integration into the multilateral trading system.

Special and differential treatment should not be seen as a concession or as an exception to the rules, but rather as a concept based on the development and policy needs of countries at differing levels of development. It should consist of a broad mix of provisions and programmes that recognize and appreciate the characteristics of developing countries and the economic challenges that trade liberalization and globalization pose for them, and it should seek to address these factors genuinely. In the words of the Prime Minister of Barbados, The Right Honourable Owen Arthur, special and differential treatment is nothing more than reciprocity with flexibility. Among equals, equality; among unequals, proportionality.

During this session, the Assembly will return to a consideration of the agenda item on the Caribbean Sea. We appeal to the members of the international community to recognize the fragility of this precious shared natural resource of the Caribbean, and its importance for most of our present and future economic activity, and agree on measures that will need to be taken to recognize the Caribbean Sea as a special area within the context of sustainable development.

Also during this Assembly session, the two hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade will be recognized. Barbados joins other delegations in requesting the Assembly to set aside a day in late March of next year to commemorate this important date. This will not only deepen our knowledge and understanding of slavery and the slave trade, but also contribute to the removal of all the vestiges of slavery.

Recent events suggest that we need to remain ever vigilant to threats of terrorism. They further remind us that once again we face increasing challenges to world peace and security. Barbados is of the view that there must be a concerted effort on the part of the international community to ensure that disputes among States do not continuously result in military action and loss of lives and that States remain faithful to the rules of humanitarian law and civilian rights.

The questioning of the efficacy of the United Nations has not abated in spite of the ongoing reform process, and the threat to multilateralism remains real. In this, our fortieth year of membership of the United Nations, Barbados reaffirms its faith in the Organization and proclaims its unwavering commitment to multilateralism. Over the past 40 years, Barbados has played its part in strengthening and widening the role of the United Nations to enable it to promote and protect human rights, to eradicate poverty and disease and to cultivate a global culture of peace.

Strengthening the role of the United Nations system in the management of global affairs and upholding and defending its moral authority remain key foreign policy priorities of the Government of Barbados. With the growing complexity and unpredictability of international affairs, especially in the context of globalization, and with the emergence of new challenges to peace and security, the fulfilment of the role of the United Nations remains critical. It is now more than ever that we need to strengthen the structures and institutions of the international system to safeguard our common interests in achieving a global order of peace and economic and social progress for all. We must all work together to reform this vital community of nations and ensure its pre-eminence in matters of development, human rights, and peace and security, and that it remains the principal forum for exercising multilateralism.

We are not at liberty to abstain from this task.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hassan Wirajuda, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia.

Mr. Wirajuda (Indonesia): I wish to congratulate you, Madam, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. It signals the increasing role of women, especially women from the Muslim world, in international affairs; and this is a very welcome and positive development. May I also thank and commend His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson for his able stewardship at the sixtieth session.

Let me now join colleagues in paying tribute to the outstanding service of His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, whose 10-year term of office as Secretary-General is about to conclude. Among the valuable services he has rendered is to give the world community a way of firmly grasping the fundamental challenges of our time: the challenge of security, the challenge of underdevelopment and the challenge of human rights and the rule of law.

We have contemplated these challenges well enough to know the answers. We know that long-term security can be achieved only through a durable and just peace, not one that is imposed on the weak by the strong. We can overcome the challenge of poverty only through a global partnership for development that will equitably distribute the benefits of globalization. The challenge of human rights and the rule of law can only be met by Governments that rule by the consent of the governed, Governments that are elected by and accountable to the people. In a word, democracy.

Peace, development and democracy are inseparable. Development is paralysed and democracy is meaningless in situations of violence and bloody conflict. Nowhere is this more poignantly true than in the Middle East. Over the years, Lebanon has rebuilt its civil-war-ravaged economy, only to be bombed to the ground recently by Israel. Hundreds of innocent civilians were killed in those military strikes, many of them women and children. The carnage stopped with the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), but this came only after a very lengthy process during which time the Lebanese people underwent so much unnecessary suffering and loss. The frustration and inability to take immediate action is radicalizing many people in the Muslim world.

This serves to prove the importance of reforming the Security Council, in its composition, as well as the way it works, so that it can take effective action when action is a matter of life and death for thousands of people, as was recently the case in Lebanon.

Deeply committed to being a part of the solution to this crisis, Indonesia is sending an 850-strong mechanized infantry battalion to form part of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), as mandated by Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). It has become an Indonesian tradition to contribute troops to United Nations peacekeeping forces. The first contingent was deployed as part of the United Nations Emergency Force I in Suez in 1957.

As for the Arab-Israeli conflict, it is essential to recognize that the problem of Palestine lies at its core. There are no military solutions to this problem, as military might can never guarantee security. There can only be a two-State solution, with the parties to the conflict assuming their responsibilities and taking concrete measures to lay down the foundations of peace. In this regard, we encourage the formation of a Palestinian government of national unity, as that will open a window of opportunity for the resumption of dialogue and for the revival of the Quartet's Road Map for peace.

We appeal to the Security Council to act on this issue with dispatch, for Muslims everywhere have a strong emotional reaction to what they perceive to be the oppression and humiliation of their Palestinian, Iraqi and Afghan co-religionists. Terrorists operating as far away from the Middle East as South-East Asia justify their heinous crimes as retaliation for what they consider to be aggression against Islam.

Thus today we are witness to the error of some Western circles attributing to Islam a propensity for violence, matched by the error of terrorist groups claiming that violent means are sanctified by Islam. The only way to liberate the human mind from these errors is through intensive and extensive dialogue.

That is why Indonesia has been actively promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue in the Asia-Pacific region and within the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). It is our way of debasing the ideology of the terrorists and at the same time empowering the moderates and strengthening the voice of moderation.

Earlier this month, we collaborated with Norway in holding the first global intermedia dialogue, which was attended by leading mass-media practitioners from five continents. For while the media can be a force for good, it can also do a great deal of harm, as shown by the recent cartoon controversy. Through this dialogue, we aimed to promote mass media sensitivity to other cultures and faiths, while upholding freedom of expression. As with the interfaith dialogue, the intermedia dialogue has been institutionalized and will be carried out annually.

There is also a great need for dialogue to address the proliferation of nuclear weapons in Asia. While the threat of nuclear weapons has subsided in other regions, a new nuclear theatre may be developing from West to East Asia.

It is therefore important that we find a diplomatic solution to the nuclear issue regarding Iran and North Korea. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), as the cornerstone of disarmament, must be strengthened. In fact, all weapons of mass destruction should be abolished.

Indeed, we must work for peace in a relentless day-to-day struggle. Even when the guns are silent, that is not enough for the long-term survival of humankind. There must also be development. There must be an end to poverty as a basic problem of the human condition; otherwise social grievances will be a constant threat to peace.

We in the international community have the resources and the skills to conquer poverty. For that goal to be attainable, however, the developed and the developing world must be able to faithfully carry out a contract of partnership that stipulates for each side a set of obligations.

We do not need to negotiate that contract; it already exists. For the past decade and a half, the international community, within the framework of the United Nations, has produced a substantial body of documents to which we have formally committed ourselves. These constitute a contract for the conquest of poverty and its attendant maladies. It is not just a contract between and among States; it is also a contract with our peoples and with future generations.

Hence, it is appropriate that the theme of our sixty-first session should be "Implementing a global partnership for development." As President Susilo

Bambang Yudhoyono pointed out recently, all we need to do is bind ourselves to this contract and carry it out according to its letter and spirit. This means political will, which is often lacking, and a streak of sincerity, which is very rare in our time.

The developed nations have four basic obligations under this contract. The first is to tear down the walls of protectionism and open up their markets to the products of the developing world. They must salvage the Doha Development Round.

Their second obligation is to relieve their developing counterparts of some of the burdens of the debt crisis. Developing countries are often unable to fund their development programmes because they have to make huge debt payments.

The third obligation of the developed countries is to ensure sufficient volumes of financial flows to developing countries, especially in the form of foreign direct investment. Many developing countries are simply too poor to muster the capital they need to get them out of poverty.

Another essential requirement of development is technology. Hence, the fourth obligation of the developed countries is to share their technology with the developing world, striking a balance between social responsibility and respect for intellectual property rights.

The obligations of developed countries must be matched by those of the developing countries, otherwise the partnership will not be equitable. The first obligation of developing countries is to practise good governance. We must therefore wage a relentless battle against all forms of corruption. The only form of capital that is abundant in the developing world is human capital. It is therefore the second obligation of the developing countries to protect and enhance that capital through education, human resources development and health care.

The third obligation of the developing countries is to provide a climate that is friendly to foreign capital, particularly foreign direct investment. This normally means a package of incentives. It also means a level playing field and a reputation for good governance.

It is our fourth and particular obligation to make use of our natural resources with wisdom so that we meet the needs of today without robbing our future generations of their legacy. These obligations are not easy to fulfil, but they must be carried out if the global partnership for development is to work.

In the case of Indonesia, we carried out the first obligation as a matter of survival: it was the only way we could climb our way out of the limbo to which the Asian financial crisis relegated us almost a decade ago. We had to make our transition to a more fully democratic system of governance, becoming, in the process, a full-fledged democracy.

We instituted reforms in every aspect of national life. Our economic recovery is a product of reform, and our new drive for economic growth is driven by reform. In the spirit of reform and dialogue, we were able to forge a peace agreement with the separatist Free Aceh Movement. The peace has been holding for more than a year and promises to be durable.

As for our human resources, our Constitution mandates that 20 per cent of our budget be allocated to education. As part of our effort to achieve universal education, we are providing free schooling to some 60 million primary through high school students. To alleviate poverty, we are continuing to extend direct cash subsidies to some 19.1 million households.

Last year, one fourth of our total population of 220 million benefited from the medical services of community health centres. We recently reduced the price of generic medicines by 30 to 50 per cent.

With regard to foreign investment, Indonesia is sending out some very positive signals. We are legislating a new package of investment incentives, including a law on tax reform, a law that rationalizes the labour market and regulations to streamline customs procedures. We are establishing special economic zones. The response of foreign direct investors was to pour some $6 billion into Indonesia last year.

To ensure the sustainability of our environment, we have launched a national programme entitled "Towards a green Indonesia" aimed at building the capacity of local government to conserve natural resources and control environmental degradation. In sum, Indonesia is ready for partnership — ready to be an active participant in that global partnership for development that will enable the developing world to reach its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). I believe that many other developing countries are just

as ready for that partnership; and, if they feel they are not ready at the moment, it takes nothing more — but nothing less as well — than political will to get themselves to a proper state of preparedness. That also applies to the countries of the developed North — they must also have the political will to fulfil their end of the partnership. Otherwise, that partnership will not be worth the paper on which so many Summit documents were printed. Given that development, peace and human dignity are inseparable, the destiny of this partnership parallels the destiny of the entire human race; a partnership for development is also a partnership for peace and for the dignity of the human being.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Borys Tarasyuk, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

Mr. Tarasyuk (Ukraine): First of all, I would like to congratulate our President on her election to this high post and to assure her of the full support of Ukraine throughout her mandate. I would also like to express our deep appreciation of her predecessor and my good friend, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his outstanding contribution to progress in implementing the decisions of the 2005 World Summit.

I would also like to pay special tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who is about to relinquish his important and noble mission. I praise Mr. Annan for his valuable personal contributions and devoted efforts to further all aspects of United Nations activities and wish him the best in his further endeavours.

We are convinced that the next Secretary-General must be a person truly deserving of the post and who will discharge this responsible duty with honour. I would like to again emphasize the justified position of the Eastern European States regarding the priority right for a representative of this region to be appointed to the top post at the United Nations. Eastern Europe remains the only region that has never had a representative serve as Secretary-General. In this respect, we welcome the nomination of Ms. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia.

Our achievements in implementing last year's Summit decisions are quite impressive. The Human Rights Council, of which Ukraine is an active member, has started its work. The Peacebuilding Commission, the Central Emergency Response Fund and the United Nations Democracy Fund are all functioning and making important contributions towards overcoming disasters and injustice. All of these are notable milestones in the process of reforming the United Nations.

Still, we are far from ensuring the adaptation of our Organization to today's realities, let alone preparing it for addressing tomorrow's threats and challenges. The reform of the Security Council, the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council, the promotion of the 2005 World Summit agenda for development and improvement in the management of the Secretariat have yet to be tackled.

It is well known that without the modernization of the Security Council, an indispensable pillar of the collective security system, reform of the United Nations would be incomplete. From standpoint of the Member States of the Eastern European Group, this thesis could be paraphrased as follows: no enlargement of the Security Council would be complete without ensuring the enhanced representation of Eastern Europe. The doubling of the Group's membership since 1991, with, most recently, the Republic of Montenegro joining the United Nations as its one hundred ninety-second Member, supports our argument. At this point, I would like to welcome the friendly Republic of Montenegro to the United Nations family.

We need to unite our efforts so that the United Nations — that is, all of us together — can adequately respond to the broad spectrum of existing and future challenges in the areas of security, development and human rights.

Recent commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the barbaric terrorist attack on this city, as well as the growing number of terrorist acts in many parts of the world, should leave no doubt that terrorism continues to remain one of the most dangerous threats of the present day.

Ukraine welcomes the recent adoption by the General Assembly of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and is ready to make important contributions towards its effective realization. This important decision has become another strong signal that terrorism will not be tolerated. The Strategy also testifies to the readiness of the international community to strengthen coordination and increase the effectiveness of measures to combat this hideous phenomenon, within the framework of a concrete

action plan. On its part, Ukraine recently ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism. We call upon Member States to make additional efforts during the current session of the General Assembly to elaborate on and adopt the comprehensive convention on international terrorism.

Ukraine is deeply concerned with the situation in the Middle East. Recent events in Lebanon and the continuing Israeli-Palestinian crisis have shown the need for more decisive international efforts aimed at returning peace and stability to this region. Violence and hatred cannot become the alternatives to the restoration of dialogue and negotiations aimed at achieving a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict on all of its tracks.

Ukraine therefore welcomes the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) on Lebanon. Support of the resolution by all parties in the region allows for hope that it will be fully implemented. As a longstanding contributor to the United Nations Peacekeeping efforts, including in the Middle East, Ukraine made its concrete proposals on contributing to the enhanced United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

The inability to agree on a set of commitments regarding disarmament and non-proliferation was one of the major setbacks of the 2005 World Summit. More than a decade ago Ukraine made a historic contribution in this area when it unilaterally renounced the world's third largest nuclear weapons arsenal. Therefore, we call upon Member States to strive for progress in the areas of disarmament and non-proliferation in the United Nations and other forums, for the sake of future generations.

Lately, the international community has been concerned with the nuclear programme of Iran. Ukraine supports the efforts of those countries that seek to gain Teheran's return to full and close cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Appropriate levels of transparency and cooperation with Iran on this issue would help to ease the concerns of the international community. Ukraine stands for the right of all nations to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes; however, in realizing this right, nations must fully adhere to commitments in the field of non-proliferation.

One of the most important tests of the ability of the United Nations to deal effectively with inter-ethnic conflict will be how the future status of Kosovo is handled.

Taking into account the fragile situation in and around Kosovo, the political process of determining its future status should be handled with maximum responsibility by all the parties involved. Any imposed decision leading to a unilateral change of borders of that internationally recognized democratic State will inevitably destabilize the situation in the Balkan region and set dangerous precedents in Europe and the entire world. Unfortunately, we are already witnessing the unfolding of an undesirable scenario created by attempts to use the Kosovo settlement as a precedent for claiming independence for several self-proclaimed regimes within the boundaries of the former Soviet Union. I refer to so-called referendums on independence recently held in Transdniestria, Moldova, and scheduled for the near future in South Ossetia, Georgia. Ukraine and the international community do not recognize these referendums, considering them illegitimate and without legal consequences.

Ukraine supports the need for negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina aimed at finding a mutually acceptable solution based on Security Council decisions, including resolution 1244 (1999). It is extremely important to ensure that the decision of the Security Council on the final status of Kosovo does not impose a solution, which can be taken only with the clearly expressed consent of both parties concerned.

As representative of Ukraine and Chair of the GUAM — Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova Group — Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, I would like to thank the countries that supported placing on the agenda of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly item 27 on protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development. It is an important step that will help to draw attention to the need for more active and effective steps by the international community to achieve progress in settling conflicts on the territory of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova. We call for implementing the initiative proposed by the President of Ukraine on Transdniestria entitled "To settlement through democracy", the plan for a peace settlement in South Ossetia presented by the President of Georgia, and for implementing the Security Council resolutions and OSCE decisions on the conflicts in Nagorny Karabakh and Abkhazia. These conflicts are among the main obstacles to the

full-scale democratic transformation of the region, which is among the core elements of Ukraine's regional policy.

Having gained a new level of integration during the Kyiv Summit last May, GUAM member States set as their main goals the strengthening of democratic values, the rule of law, and human rights and fundamental freedoms, the deepening of European integration, and the achievement of sustainable development and the greater well-being of their peoples.

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) is another promising model of multilateral political and economic cooperation. During the 14 years of its dynamic existence, that organization has proved its value as a framework for regional cooperation. Because issues of energy security are very important for Europe today, the Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions take on special significance for the secure, stable extraction and transportation of energy resources. Ukraine is ready to take an active part in promoting energy projects within the BSEC framework. We are convinced that the BSEC can effectively support the efforts of the world community to combat terrorism, resolve the so-called frozen conflicts in the region and combat trans-border crime. It is necessary to coordinate BSEC activity with corresponding programmes supported by the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union and NATO.

The Forum of the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC), held in Kyiv in December 2005, is another example of cooperation aimed at strengthening European democratic values in Eastern Europe. The CDC is a forum in which the States of the Baltic Sea-Black Sea-Caspian Sea area with the Balkans discuss their aspirations for the higher democratic standards required for full-scale European integration. GUAM, BSEC and the CDC are valuable contributions to the creation of an Eastern Europe area akin to the European Union area of democracy, stability and prosperity.

Democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are essential elements of Ukraine's domestic and foreign policies. That is why we are proud to have been elected to the Human Rights Council. As a member of that body, Ukraine is ready to work with other States to bring about real change through the promotion of human rights worldwide.

The international community is responsible for protecting people threatened with genocide or other violations of fundamental human rights. In two years, we will mark the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. One and a half decades before the adoption of the Convention, and even before the tragedy of the Holocaust, the Ukrainian people was a victim of genocide. Deliberately organized by the Communist totalitarian regime for the purpose of destroying the vital core of the freedom-loving Ukrainian people — its peasantry — the Holodomor in Ukraine of 1932 and 1933 killed 7 million to 10 million innocent men, women and children, about 25 per cent of Ukraine's population at that time. The Communist regime tried to conceal the scale and tragic consequences of that inhuman crime from the world community, and they succeeded for a long time.

After Ukraine regained its independence, many new appalling and horrifying facts were revealed. The parliaments of a number of countries have recognized the Holodomor of 1932 and 1933 as an act of genocide. Ukraine calls on the United Nations, as the collective voice of the international community, to contribute to the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Convention by recognizing the Holodomor as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian people. That step would contribute towards making genocide and mass abuse of human rights impossible in the future.

With the same aim, a number of events will take place in Kyiv tomorrow to commemorate the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy. The mass executions by the Nazis there were among the first sad pages of the evolving tragedy of the Holocaust. Etched in the memory of the Ukrainian people, it also saw the death of tens of thousands of Soviet prisoners of war of various nationalities. This event will be yet another important reminder of the lessons of history and the need to prevent all manifestations of anti-Semitism, xenophobia and intolerance.

Needless to say, we should focus on implementing the Millennium Development Goals and new commitments on the global development agenda made at the 2005 World Summit. There has been mixed progress in this area, and the commitments and promises made have not yet been translated into action

with direct impact on the lives of peoples in need. The response to global threats should be effective and timely. It took the international community nearly 20 years since the first recorded cases of AIDS to recognize that this disease could threaten the very existence of humanity. The twenty-sixth special session of the Assembly initiated by Ukraine together with other States, and held in 2001, was a turning point in combating HIV/AIDS. I want to confirm Ukraine's commitment to implementing the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (resolution S-26/2) and to express hope for continuing close cooperation in this field with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, with the World Bank and with United Nations specialized agencies.

Lately, we have witnessed the emergence of a new disease that potentially poses no less a challenge to humanity than HIV/AIDS. Avian influenza threatens the entire world and knows no borders. It is our joint responsibility to ensure that all countries are protected against this threat. Combating the spread of avian influenza and preparations for a possible pandemic of human influenza demand concerted action at the national, regional and global levels. Should we repeat the mistakes of the past or should we learn the lessons and thus meet the challenge prepared? We believe that the General Assembly should consider the problem and provide the answer.

In the more than 60 years since its creation, the United Nations has grown both in numbers — from 51 States to 192 — and in quality. Our Organization has gained invaluable experience in changing the world so that every person can enjoy more security, justice and dignity. However, much remains yet to be achieved. I believe that it is within our power and in our interest to do all we can to ensure that the world is united not only by a common past but by a common future as well.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Bedjaoui, Minister of State, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria.

Mr. Bedjaoui (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): At a time when the United Nations continues on its path towards universality by welcoming a new Member State — Montenegro, with which Algeria has been involved in multi-faceted cooperation — the very basis of our institution is once again being tested by the grave developments in the situation in the Middle East, with violence directed at our brother peoples of Palestine and Lebanon. Because of their context, their scope and the breadth of their consequences at various levels, those acts of aggression — which cannot merely be seen as passing occurrences — point an accusing finger at the limitations imposed upon the authority of the United Nations when it is faced with conflict situations which run counter to its very raison d'être.

In the vast areas of the developing world, in particular throughout Muslim civilization, a silent frustration is growing and increasing before the powerlessness of the United Nations to support the most elementary human values of the Palestinian and Lebanese people.

The Middle East is without doubt the most unstable region of the world. There we see the great cruelty, flagrant denial of justice and recurrent waves of violence that are reflected in the serious deterioration of the humanitarian and security situation. This makes the prospect of establishing a just and lasting peace in the region a remote one. The Palestinian people are improperly subjected to collective punishment, and Lebanon — whose suffering is exemplified by the relentless Israeli attack against Qana — has been caught up in a murderous war, in which the Lebanese people were able to hold at bay the infernal firepower and destructive capability directed against it.

In the same geopolitical sphere, lack of security and instability persist in Iraq. The daily ransom paid in heavy human losses is submerged in a pernicious effect of habit and trivialization. The establishment of the Government of National Unity, and that Government's decision to opt for inclusive national reconciliation are first steps in the right direction. Algeria welcomes the positive response to those developments from the main political forces in Iraq, and we believe that the best way to ensure the success of the ongoing political process — with its objective of allowing Iraq to fully recover its sovereignty in the framework of national unity and territorial integrity — would be through intensified efforts to avoid further fratricidal schism in the country along ethnic and religious fault lines.

One year ago, at the World Summit, we defined a path together towards comprehensive reform of the United Nations. By joining the consensus on adoption of a series of specific reform measures, the non-aligned countries hoped to contribute to the transformation of the United Nations into an instrument capable of

addressing the new challenges and threats confronting the international community.

First of all, we have seen the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission, an innovative institutional mechanism that has long been lacking in the Organization. We saw also the establishment of the Human Rights Council, which also marks progress for the international community as it seeks to achieve universal respect for all human rights. However, a great deal remains to be done in order to attain the objectives which have been set in the reform process.

Thus, it is important that we strengthen our efforts in order to succeed at this session in achieving comprehensive agreement on pending issues, in particular reform of the Security Council. Through such comprehensive reform, the Security Council should become more representative in its membership, more democratic and more transparent in its functioning and more in harmony with the positions of the General Assembly, in order to provide greater legitimacy to its decisions and to enhance its effectiveness.

The peoples of the United Nations had hoped that the celebration of the Organization's sixtieth anniversary would return us to the principles and purposes of the Charter, and enable us to re-draw the plans it outlined. But today's world is full of uncertainty and too many problems still weigh upon it. It is confronted with more threats than ever — all of them equally dangerous — which must be addressed in a consistent manner in order to better determine their root causes and thus to enable the international community to act with determination to eliminate them for good.

That is true for terrorism, which continues to strike communities with its well-known horror and cruelty and without distinction as to race, sex or religion. The fight against that scourge, from which no country is safe, requires unified cooperation at both the regional and international level, using clear and complementary approaches.

Algeria, which has long suffered from terrorist violence — to which some have reacted with indifference and others with complacency — can only welcome the fact that the international community has become aware of the seriousness of the threat of terrorism upon international peace and security. It stresses the urgency of concluding a comprehensive convention against international terrorism, which should contain an unequivocal definition of that scourge and draw a distinction between the legitimate struggle of peoples against foreign occupation, on the one hand, and on the other, acts perpetrated by terrorist groups or individuals, and which would be careful not to confuse that scourge with any particular religion, civilization or geographic area.

I would like to reiterate our legitimate concern as we are faced with the deadlock of the multilateral disarmament process, and the disagreement that has emerged, here and there, on the issue of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The goal has remained the same. Disarmament must be overall and complete and under effective international control. The policy of nuclear non-proliferation must be pursued in both its horizontal and vertical dimensions and those countries that have voluntarily given up the military nuclear option have the right to expect security guarantees and free access without discrimination to nuclear technology for peaceful uses.

In the Western Sahara, the last territory which must be decolonized in Africa, the Saharan people remain deprived of their inalienable right to self-determination, as enshrined in the Charter and relevant United Nations resolutions. Just as in 1991 with the adoption of the Settlement Plan, in 2003 the international community, after the unanimous adoption by the Security Council of the peace plan proposed by Mr. James Baker, former Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, the United Nations had the hope of seeing a just and lasting settlement to the conflict. But today we must note that no positive evolution of that conflict has taken place, because of the rejection of the peace plan by one of the two parties to the conflict and its desire to prejudge to its advantage, the final status of the territory — a status which can only be determined through a referendum on self-determination.

Algeria, which has no claims whatsoever on that territory and is not in any way involved in the conflict — which has only two parties as designated by the international community, namely, the Kingdom of Morocco and the Polisario Front — has taken note of the unanimous adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1675 (2006), which reaffirms the right to self-determination of the Saharan people. Deeply respectful of the "Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples" as

contained in General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960, Algeria will continue to support all efforts designed to enable the Saharan people to exercise their right to self-determination with full sovereignty in conditions that are incontestably free and transparent.

In another area, the outcome of the seventh African Union Summit in Banjul shows a mixed record concerning the development of various crises and other conflicts situations on the continent, in particular in the Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan and Somalia. Serious efforts are being deployed in order to promote interaction between the United Nations and the African Union, in order to effectively deal with those situations, which have often shown themselves to be complicated and difficult.

What is more important — a culture of peace is developing throughout Africa as a result of a renewal and recovery, the foundations of which were established by African leaders of the region through the creation of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

In that light, it is extremely important to insure that the peaceful settlement of the crisis in Darfur, with full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Sudan and in keeping with the Abuja accord, move hand in hand with harmonious action based on the good will of all, in particular of the African Union and the United Nations.

The question of development is, rightly, one of the highest priorities of the United Nations agenda, in particular following the adoption in September 2000 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). So, too is the eradication of poverty, which weighs heavily upon the conscience of mankind. However, the gap that exists to date between the goals and the progress achieved is such that decisive efforts are essential in order to insure that Africa will achieve its goals by the year 2015. Similar great efforts are required from the developed countries to honour their commitments undertaken at the time of the Millennium Summit, the International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey, as well as the 2005 World Summit.

At the time of the sixtieth anniversary of the creation of the Organization, all of us realized that the world had profoundly changed and that it was necessary to adjust our activities to the new realities. Faced with the many challenges and structural threats of our time, the 2005 World Summit gave us a clear diagnosis and prescribed the necessary remedies. One year later — the state of the world today further stresses how acute the problems are and the urgency of solving them. It makes it crystal clear that it would be pointless to dwell on the uncertainties and imbalances, as well as the precarious situations that have become an inextricable part of the fabric of international society, unless we want to doom that society to chronic instability and insecurity.

Truthfully, the imperfect achievements and limited gains made by the international community, at a time when globalization has greatly shrunk both time and space, demand of us that we view the future with genuine resolve, concerning what has to be done, rather than resign ourselves to what merely appears possible. In that connection, there is no alternative to a truly democratic reform of the United Nations that includes the participation of all countries. There is no viable option other than a globalization based upon peace and prosperity that benefits all of humankind.

The Acting President: I now call on Mr. Dimitrij Rupel, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovenia.

Mr. Rupel (Slovenia): Let me first congratulate Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election to the presidency of the General Assembly. We believe that under her guidance we will continue the reform process laid out in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1). Our warm appreciation also goes to Mr. Jan Eliasson, President at the sixtieth session, for his inspiring leadership.

Let me take the opportunity to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his brilliant opening speech a few days ago (see A/61/PV.3), and for his decade of dedicated work for the United Nations. Slovenia appreciates the role of the Secretary-General in helping to expand our understanding of pressing issues, such as the protection of civilians and the responsibility to protect. The commitment of the Secretary-General to mainstreaming human rights in the work of the Organization and his emphasis on the rule of law in international relations and nationally will remain a permanent legacy. The report "In larger freedom" (A/59/2005) contains a fair vision of the global responsibility that we share and reminds us of the inevitable challenges that lie ahead.

We live in a tightly interconnected, interdependent and transparent world. It is logical and it is right that nations should support and help each other. What place in the world is more appropriate for that recommendation than the United Nations? All nations and all people should be asking themselves how they can help each other. It appears that assistance and contributions from affluent countries are more effective. It seems easier for large nations to be great nations. Unfortunately, not all nations are large. That is true of most nations of the world, and it is, of course, true of my country.

The implementation of the global partnership for development is a priority of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to which Slovenia is fully committed. The new external financial instruments of the European Union as well as the tenth European Development Fund open a new chapter in the relations of the European Union with developing countries and strengthen Europe's role as a global partner in development. That is a promising sign of progress in the fulfilment of our commitments under the Millennium Declaration.

In order to contribute in an important way, the small countries must make a special effort. We can, in fact, be effective. Smaller countries rarely threaten or endanger other countries. They have knowledge of small systems and knowledge of minorities within large systems. They can perform special tasks that demand special qualities and particular capabilities such as flexibility, adaptability, a spirit of empathy and cooperation. They can serve as honest brokers. There are a number of successful small and medium-sized countries. They can help each other to assume creative and relevant positions as part of the international community.

At the United Nations, we should continue to review the concept of sovereignty. Many fear that the erosion of sovereignty provides grounds for interfering in State internal affairs. Indeed, the potential for misuse is real. History teaches us that checks and balances are necessary in order to shield right against might. At the same time, the sovereignty of States must be understood in the context of contemporary reality. National borders are no longer an excuse for the international community to turn a blind eye to genocide, crimes against humanity and other gross human rights violations.

Last year, for the first time world leaders formally and universally affirmed the concept of the responsibility to protect. The 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1) provides a detailed framework for individual and collective responsibility, in areas ranging from prevention and protection to rebuilding. We regard the framework as a conceptual breakthrough and wish to stress the need for all members of the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to deliver on the implementation of that responsibility in practice.

Many crises are evolving as we speak, some of which the international community will try to resolve, while giving less attention to others. The suffering of the civilian population in Darfur calls for our immediate efforts. We should not allow the tragedy that occurred in Rwanda or Bosnia and Herzegovina to be repeated in Darfur or anywhere else.

Attention to the Western Balkans must not diminish. We are committed to standing by our partners in the region in their endeavours to expand their relationship with the European Union and to facilitate the advent of prosperity for their citizens. Kosovo is now approaching an important and possibly sui generis stage in the peace process. Finding common ground between Serbian and Kosovar Albanian positions and striking a political deal will be difficult. We are confident, nevertheless, that all those involved will summon up sufficient courage to take a critical step forward and thus enable all ethnic groups in that region to coexist peacefully and cooperate. We hope that the integration process in Europe will provide the appropriate vehicle for the stabilization of the region.

The disintegration of rigid systems like those of the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia has produced a number of new States and new Members of the United Nations. The process has sometimes been called Balkanization. But a closer look will reveal that many of the newborn countries, contrary to expectations, have not regressed. Quite the opposite: a lot of them have progressed, democratized and reintegrated, or have expressed the desire to integrate in a different way and have positioned themselves on a new level. Many former republics of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia have thus become, or intend to become, members of new multinational systems, such as the European Union.

Occasionally, we still hear expressions of hesitation and fear: we should not, they say, sacrifice our national interests for the sake of integration. One of the problems of the international community today is complex relations within multinational, multi-ethnic and multicultural systems. The question is how to facilitate the productive coexistence of national, ethnic, religious and other minorities.

In the past, in Europe and elsewhere, mighty dynasties or nations, driven by the ambition to rule over weaker nations and minorities, practised imposed integration. Modern integration no longer rests on subordination; it depends on solidarity and cooperation. Modern nations cultivate complementarity. In the future, the United Nations should encourage new projects and provide an efficient framework for the management of religious diversity and dialogue between cultures. We could then learn from countries that had experienced a successful transition from a central and autocratic system to a decentralized and democratic system. Essentially, we are concerned with sustained assistance in the transition to democracy and coexistence within multi-ethnic or multicultural systems.

I support the idea of the dialogue of cultures. However, we should be careful not to develop that concept into a clearinghouse for one set of standards. If so, failure is a certainty. A dialogue between two sides each convinced of the absolute truth of its own existence is impossible. When dealing with subjective or intimate concepts like faith, respect and individual dignity, we can only hope to encourage debate within individual systems, not between them. In the latter case, one would be imposing one's truth on the value system of another.

Rather, a dialogue of cultures should be a venue for cross-cultural discussion on objective matters like democratic political systems, sustainable development, security and energy. The promotion of dialogue on matters of faith, culture or civilization is an indispensable tool to create bridges between different cultures.

Is there a general clash of civilizations? My own answer is "no". On the other hand, we should not underestimate local and temporary clashes that may serve purposes far from genuine cultural or religious issues. There is one welcome and necessary clash: the clash of our common and global civilization against illegitimate radical groups that strive for power by means of terror and that abuse religious beliefs and ethnic bonds for their own particular agendas. We have to be aware of this when dealing with such issues in our own countries and stand ready to assist each other if we are to preserve the universal values of civilization.

Last year, Slovenia chaired the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; today, we begin our year at the helm of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and a little more than a year from now we shall assume the presidency of the European Union (EU). As a member, and current Chair, of the Human Security Network, a group of nations with diverse regional affiliations, we are looking forward to deepening the understanding of the concept of human security in order to be better equipped to overcome the complex problems of the modern world.

One of the items on the agenda of the Slovenian EU presidency will certainly be energy security. To facilitate insight into regional energy and stability issues, the international conference entitled Caspian Outlook 2008, recently organized in Slovenia under the auspices of the Bled Strategic Forum, offered an interesting experience in terms of how such issues can be addressed at the regional level by parties that share the same concern but look at it from different perspectives. At the end of the day, all interested partners have much to gain from political stability, reliable flows of energy and stronger partnerships.

The Middle East crisis once again calls for the focused attention of the international community. Attempts to address this problem in all its complexity and with the involvement of many countries should continue with renewed energy. Slovenia is playing its part in contributing to the immediate relief of the situation in Lebanon through its contribution of troops to the United Nations peacekeeping force there.

Slovenia welcomes the progress made towards the implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. However, there are some aspects of mine action on which we should continue to focus: dealing with the universality of the Convention, the clearing of minefields and providing assistance to mine victims. Through its International Trust Fund for Demining and

Mine Victims Assistance, Slovenia is striving to alleviate the humanitarian threat that anti-personnel landmines still pose to the safety, health and lives of local civilian populations.

I am grateful for the opportunity to highlight, in front of this distinguished audience, the importance of the role of small countries. Their orientations, activities and possibilities can contribute significantly to multilateralism.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Kinga Göncz, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary.

Ms. Göncz (Hungary): I first congratulate Her Excellency Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election as the third female President of the General Assembly. I firmly believe that the involvement of women in the decision-making processes at the national and international levels can contribute to the better management of today's global problems. In fulfilling her challenging tasks during the sixty-first session, the President may rest assured of the support and cooperation of the representatives of the Republic of Hungary. I also wish to salute her predecessor, Ambassador Jan Eliasson, who served us with distinction, dedication, an innovative spirit and a good sense of humour. He made great efforts and achievements to advance the reform of the United Nations.

During the 2005 World Summit, our heads of State or Government agreed to proposals with the potential to adapt the world Organization to the realities of our contemporary world. While we have accomplished only modest reforms so far, we should remind ourselves that United Nations reform is more a process than a single event.

In order to foster public confidence in the United Nations, we must agree on substantial management reform, with greater accountability and transparency and better allocation of resources. The reform process should include all the main bodies of this Organization, including the General Assembly, which, in our view, must remain the most important deliberative body of the Organization.

Hungary supports the expansion of the Security Council in both the permanent and non-permanent categories to better reflect the political realities of today. However, new approaches need to be identified to facilitate the emergence of a compromise. The enlargement of the Council should be combined with enhanced efficiency and improved working methods.

Hungary condemns all forms of terrorism, which give rise to fear and distrust in our daily lives. It is our firm conviction that the United Nations should remain a key player in the international fight against the scourge of terror. It is therefore natural that Hungary welcomes the recent adoption of the new United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288) and looks forward to the elaboration of a comprehensive convention on terrorism by the General Assembly.

The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission was one of our top priorities. We believe that the Commission is well equipped to deal with fragile post-conflict situations.

With the establishment of the Human Rights Council, the international community has opened a whole new chapter in its joint efforts to protect human rights. My Government has wholeheartedly supported this ambitious project from the outset. We sincerely hope that with the completion of the Council's first year of existence, adequate machinery will be put in place to address the challenges of the twenty-first century. The universal periodic review is one of the initiatives on the Council's agenda and holds the promise of making a real difference. The full and unhindered participation of non-governmental organizations in the activities of the Council is also of vital importance for us.

Protection of minority rights, including those of national minorities, is a pivotal element of Hungary's human rights policies. The turbulent history of our region has all too often demonstrated the potential of inter-ethnic tensions to trigger crisis situations. Conflicts based on ethnicity, both past and present, must remind us all that multi-ethnic societies are in desperate need of a sensitive and careful approach to minority issues, sound legal arrangements, generosity in practice and firmly embedded institutional guarantees, safeguarding the rights of minorities.

The interdependence of democracy and human rights is clearly demonstrated in countries and regions with a deficit of democratic practices. As the late Sergio Vieira de Mello, former High Commissioner for Human Rights, stated so eloquently, "Imperfect as the ship of democracy may be, no other vessel has proved

as seaworthy in bringing us safely to the shores of human dignity".

Driven by the policy objective of promoting democracy, the Government of Hungary launched the International Centre for Democratic Transition last year in Budapest. The Centre intends to provide guidance regarding transition in a supportive manner by collecting experience from past democratic transitions and sharing it with those determined to follow that path. Hungary fully supported the Secretary-General's decision to establish the United Nations Democracy Fund. Being a member of the Advisory Board and a contributor to the Fund, we are pleased to recognize that the projects approved by the Fund properly reflect local, regional and global demands.

Fifty years have passed since the citizens of Hungary rose up against a brutal dictatorship, demanding democracy, human rights and dignity. The totalitarian regime crushed the dreams of the Hungarian revolution and took cruel revenge during its return to power on top of foreign tanks.

The spirit of 1956, however, was not to be defeated. Fifty years ago, the Hungarian revolution began with a peaceful demonstration to show solidarity with the Polish nation. Today, I am proud to confirm that Hungary will show solidarity with every nation that seeks freedom and democracy for its people.

It is my moral obligation to express our profound respect for the activities of the dedicated politicians and diplomats who kept the so-called Hungarian question on the agenda of the world Organization for several years. Hungary will never forget the devotion of Povl Bang-Jensen, the Danish United Nations officer who served as Secretary of the United Nations Committee entrusted with the examination of the Hungarian events of 1956. His efforts and sacrifice made for the sake of the Hungarian revolution are etched on our collective memory forever.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems constitutes a major threat to international peace and security. The most important challenge faced by the international community in this context is non-compliance with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). My Government sincerely hopes that the next NPT review cycle will ultimately bring tangible results, and it urges all nations to make genuine contributions to that effect.

Working out lasting solutions for unresolved issues relating to the western Balkans is of paramount importance for peace and stability in the European continent. Hungary is convinced that the success of the status talks in Kosovo will depend on the ability of the parties to build mutually acceptable arrangements, which, in turn, will require a proper time frame. A functioning multicultural society in Kosovo is inseparable from the sincere implementation of standards, respect for minority rights and effective decentralization, all of which are essential preconditions for the successful outcome of the status talks.

Hungary is fully committed to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. It is essential to revitalize the peace process on the basis of the Road Map and other agreements accepted by the parties concerned. Israel has the right to live in peace and security, and the Palestinians have the right to an independent and viable Palestinian State peacefully coexisting with its neighbours.

Peace and stability in Lebanon are vitally important for the entire Middle East. The international community, along with the parties concerned, must make every effort to ensure the swift and full implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

The Republic of Hungary is strongly committed to building a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Our resolve has been manifested by my Government's recent decision to take over the leadership of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Baghlan province. Although major efforts are being undertaken by the international community to assist in the reconstruction process in Afghanistan, the primary responsibility for the stabilization and development of the country lies with the Afghan people themselves.

Hungary remains gravely concerned about the prolonged and dramatic security situation in Iraq. We welcome the resolve of the Iraqi Government to engage all communities in order to achieve reconciliation and strengthen national cohesion. I would like to reiterate Hungary's continued commitment to assisting the people of Iraq in their endeavour to build a free and prosperous country.

The deteriorating situation in Darfur is another matter of grave concern. The Government of the Sudan should agree to the swift deployment of a United

Nations peacekeeping force with a mission to halt the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe. In this regard, Hungary also hopes that at this session the General Assembly will make advances in the elaboration of the important concept of the responsibility to protect.

Six years ago, the Governments of the world made a solemn pledge to strive to eliminate global poverty by signing the Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2). A great deal remains to be done to achieve the objectives set out in the Millennium Development Goals, in developing countries, by the donor community and here at the United Nations. We need to make sure that development, in rich and poor countries alike, is sustainable. As a new EU member, Hungary is gradually increasing its official development assistance and recognizes the special development needs of the world's poorest regions.

In conclusion, I would like to thank and commend the outgoing Secretary-General for his tireless efforts during the past 10 years, often under difficult and challenging circumstances, to promote the principles of the Charter. His devotion, diplomatic skills and vision have earned him profound respect all over the world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Michael Frendo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Malta.

Mr. Frendo (Malta): I would like to congratulate Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. I am confident that her efforts will ensure a successful outcome of this session. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the outgoing President, His Excellency Jan Eliasson, with whom the Assembly worked over the past 12 months on the successful implementation of many of the major reform tasks agreed upon at the Summit last year.

The theme chosen by the President for this year's session — "Implementing a global partnership for development" — strikes at the heart of the challenges facing mankind today. It also reflects the Summit's emphasis on the interlinked and mutually reinforcing nature of development, peace and security and human rights. Sustainable development in the economic, social and environmental sphere constitutes a key element of the overarching framework of United Nations activities. We support that approach and, convinced of the ripple effect of development policies that benefit all mankind, urge the General Assembly to increase its focus on development issues.

Poverty eradication and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the priorities for this decade. In this regard, the *Millennium Development Goals Report 2006* indicates that certain regions of the world have made much less progress than others. Extreme poverty remains a daily reality for the more than 1 billion people who subsist on less than one dollar a day. Whereas Asia leads the way in reducing poverty rates, the number of poor people in Africa is rising. In terms of per capita income, 18 of the 20 poorest countries in the world are in Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest poverty rate in the world, and the situation of chronic food insecurity has not improved over the past decade. Four fifths of armed conflicts occur in Africa and Asia. Clearly, there can be no development without security and no security without development.

The realities of poverty, conflict and insecurity are at the root of the phenomenon of mass migration from Africa to Europe along the major routes — into the Canary Islands and mainland Spain in the eastern Mediterranean, and into Malta and Italy in the central Mediterranean.

Lack of development, security and good governance has a direct effect on a country such as mine, which, with 1,200 persons per square kilometre, is already one of the most densely populated countries in the world. In addition, it is a small island State with a small population of 400,000.

The burden of underdevelopment and lack of security in Africa, in particular sub-Saharan Africa, is therefore inordinately borne by my country, which is suffering real hardship as thousands of illegal migrants reach our shores. The 2005 statistics of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) rank Malta as the country with the second-highest number of asylum applications, in contrast to a 15.6 per cent decrease in asylum applications across the rest of the European Union.

We urge the United Nations and its agencies to address the issue of mass illegal immigration holistically and with vigour and urgency. In that endeavour, all the countries of world are called upon to combat criminal organizations that, across frontiers, are taking advantage of the aspirations of human beings who have nearly lost all hope. The rule of law

must be respected. International obligations undertaken by countries in accordance with public international law must be honoured. Ignoring or insufficiently addressing the phenomenon of illegal immigration puts at risk the hard-won rights of genuine refugees and persons who must be protected with humanitarian status under international law.

I therefore call on the General Assembly and the United Nations as a whole — but in particular the UNHCR — to lend their full support to those countries that, like Malta, have an inherent fragility arising from density of population and smallness of territorial size in their efforts to combat illegal immigration and address the hardships that they experience as countries of destination.

Malta needs support — including from the UNHCR — in the resettlement of refugees and persons with humanitarian status. It needs support in shouldering the financial burden that it assumes in providing for the basic needs of the illegal immigrants on its soil. It needs international support in combating the criminal organizations that are benefiting financially from illegal immigration while putting the lives of immigrants at risk.

No country can tackle such an overwhelming phenomenon on its own. Illegal immigration requires a holistic international approach that includes combating criminal organizations — particularly in the countries of origin and transit — and strengthening border control; promoting good governance, economic development and the rule of law; resettling refugees and persons with humanitarian status; and returning illegal immigrants to their countries of origin and transit and reintegrating them into society. As part of such a holistic approach, we must take into consideration the special characteristics of a number of particularly vulnerable countries on the routes of migration between Africa and Europe, which, as countries of destination, are carrying a burden far greater than they can bear.

This issue was also examined in detail during the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, which took place last week. Malta, which took an active part in the Dialogue, looks forward to greater engagement on the part of countries of origin, transit and destination. In particular, we look forward to the high-level conference on migration of the European Union and the African Union, scheduled to be held in Tripoli, Libya, before the end of this year. Such engagement, which should have the active support of international organizations operating in this field, would continue the process of "trialogue", which was successfully undertaken at the Rabat Conference last July. It could also serve as effective follow-up to the recent United Nations Dialogue.

In focusing on development issues, we must emphasize that development needs to be sustainable, to respect the environment and to take into account the rights of future generations, children, young people and those yet unborn. Development does not mean a free-for-all attitude towards the exploitation of the Earth's bountiful resources. There must be sustainable development that allows our forests to regenerate, our air to be pure and our seas to be free of pollution.

Climate change and global warming are not issues that can be relegated to intellectual exercises. Positive political action is required to address the problems related to global warming and to prevent an exacerbation of the consequences of lack of care for the environment. As a number of dramatic experiences have already shown, the consequences of lack of respect for the planet and its environmental balances have been borne in particular by the world's poor, whether in developing or developed economies. A concerted effort by all mankind is therefore required in this area. The United Nations is the appropriate forum for addressing these issues, which affect all countries. The fragility of our planet and its ecosystem means that all of us have a greater responsibility to act rapidly and together.

A global partnership for development needs to be carried out in peace and stability. However, in today's world, global peace and security are constantly threatened by destructive and violent events. In that regard, we must pay particular attention to the prolonged impasse that has thwarted the work of the Conference on Disarmament. That impasse is endangering the very multilateral mechanisms that were created to foster peace, security and cooperation. States members of the Conference have a grave responsibility towards all United Nations Member States in helping humanity to address the challenges of non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control. As the Secretary-General stated in his address to the Conference on Disarmament last June, "With political will, this Conference can reclaim its former mantle and generate tangible benefits that could shape the course

of history" (*CD/PV.1028, p. 5*). That is a challenge for us all.

Another challenge for us all is to persevere in all our efforts to resolve conflicts, even if they seem to persist over long periods of time and regardless of the number of peace initiatives undertaken by the international community.

The recent conflict in Lebanon was a tragic reminder of how easily a population can slide quickly back into a conflict situation. Today, the clouds have lifted a little so that new rays of hope can break through. We wish that country well. We believe that it could serve as a unique laboratory for democratic and cultural pluralism within a peaceful society in the Middle East.

In the same region, a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains elusive. Fatalism is not an option. The international community, through the United Nations and other mechanisms such as the Quartet, must maintain its concerted and determined efforts to find a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to this long-festering conflict, which has a bearing on all other issues in the Middle East and, indeed, in the wider global context. We welcome the intense and frank debate that took place last week in the Security Council on this issue (see S/PV.5530).

The President returned to the Chair.

Malta respects and supports the aspirations of the Palestinian people to nationhood and dignity, and in equal measure respects and supports the aspirations of the Israeli people to live in peace within secure borders. Those two aspirations are mutually compatible and achievable through peaceful and just means. A solution can be achieved only through strict and abiding respect for the rules and norms of international law, including humanitarian law.

On the ground, the continuing and increasingly deteriorating humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people is an intolerable burden on the international conscience. We must acknowledge and applaud the sterling work being carried out by the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Ms. Karen AbuZayd, and all of the Agency's dedicated staff to assist the refugee population in no fewer than 58 refugee camps in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, where one third of Palestinian refugees live.

The international community needs to continue to strengthen its tools for addressing natural emergencies wherever in the world they occur, in a spirit of solidarity with nations and human beings. In that regard, the decision taken earlier this year — as a follow-up to the Summit — on the revitalization and upgrading of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund — now the Central Emergency Response Fund — is an important step forward. In that context, the role of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, under the able leadership of Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland, continues to be a crucial mechanism for dealing with the coordination needed to strengthen humanitarian responses to natural disasters and complex emergencies.

The tragic experience of the December 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami galvanized efforts to plot the outlines of an international early warning system across all oceans. That experience and its aftermath, however, show that much still remains to be done to respond more rapidly, efficiently and effectively to natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies.

In this context, I note with great interest the valuable work done to date by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission's Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Tsunami Early Warning and Mitigation System in the North-Eastern Atlantic, the Mediterranean and Connected Seas. Located at the centre of the Mediterranean and fully aware of the havoc that a tsunami could cause in the basin, Malta calls for speeding up the implementation of a Mediterranean tsunami early warning and mitigation system. This goal needs to be achieved as soon as possible. We are prepared to play a proactive role together with other States in the region in establishing a fully functioning tsunami warning system.

In such phenomena, not just regional but full global coverage is essential to the success of the system. The Assembly should examine what needs to be done to achieve this in the shortest time possible. In particular, recent tsunami phenomena which were smaller but which also claimed lives have shown that while it is important for countries to have early warning systems that are interlinked, it is equally crucial to transmit the early warning received by a

country immediately to people on the beaches and in the most vulnerable coastal areas and to have in place crisis management mechanisms that can accelerate evacuation to safety. This requires the setting of international warning-transmission standards across the globe, which, if effectively implemented, can save lives.

Malta believes that this should be a joint task for the international community as a whole and calls on the international community to consider immediately the best means to respond to tsunami experiences with appropriate legal and other instruments that address the need for standards of transmission of early warnings to population in the most vulnerable areas in all the countries of the world. The setting of international standards for preparing for phenomena such as tsunamis can provide countries with an appropriate up-to-date measuring stick and continuously upgraded preparation.

The international community needs multilateralism. The process of institutional reform is another necessary and important component of efforts to enhance effective multilateralism. Over the past months, some slow progress has been made in following up the decisions taken at last year's World Summit in this regard. We are all conscious of the efforts that need to continue at this session of the General Assembly on various aspects of institutional reform, including the most sensitive one, relating to the enlargement and reform of the Security Council. That matter has gained in urgency; the impasse should be broken by flexibility and openness to a search for common ground.

A new Secretary-General will be taking the reins of this Organization in the new year. The person elected will need all our encouragement and support to fulfil the vital and demanding tasks of that unique office. To the outgoing Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, we express our immense sense of gratitude and admiration for the way in which he has conducted his work over the past 10 years and for his total dedication to the cause of peace and the international rule of law.

The cause of peace and the international rule of law are threatened daily by cultural and religious incomprehension. An alliance of civilizations, mutual respect and tolerance, acceptance of the other and of diversity, peaceful coexistence and cooperation and dialogue and education are the means which the international community has at its disposal to counteract the ugly phenomena of extremism and fanaticism. We cannot ignore this threat to peace and stability, a threat that is compounded by poverty and mass migration. We must further strengthen multilateralism as a means of world governance.

In this context, we need to keep in mind the general without losing sight of the specific. The United Nations must remain the focus of the debate on this issue and needs to continue to engage with the world media to spread the message and spirit of fraternity in a world where large or small does not count. Equally, experience has amply illustrated that small countries, just as large ones, are essential to global security, cultural interchange and respect and tolerance for diversity.

As a Mediterranean State, as a member of the European Union, as current Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth and, generally, as a member of the international community of States, Malta is determined to continue to make a contribution in all those forums — and in this forum — towards the interests of peace, justice and the rule of international law in the world today and in the future.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.